

centuries of the Republic – the warfare at home, the victories for ‘liberty’ and the military victories over Rome’s neighbours in Italy – we must look a little harder at the story of the birth of the Republic and the invention of the consulship. Predictably perhaps, it was not quite as smooth a process as the standard story, which I have given so far, makes it appear.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# ROME’S GREAT LEAP FORWARD

*Two centuries of change: from the Tarquins to Scipio Long-Beard*

HOW DID THE Republic really begin? Ancient Roman historians were experts at turning historical chaos into a tidy narrative and always keen to imagine that their familiar institutions went back much further than they really did. For them the transition from monarchy to Republic was as smooth as any revolution could be: the Tarquins fled; the new form of government emerged fully formed; the consulship was instantly established, providing the new order with its chronology from year one. In reality, the whole process must have been more gradual than that story suggests, and messier. The ‘Republic’ was born slowly, over a period of decades, if not centuries. It was reinvented many times over.

Even the consuls did not go back to the beginning of the new regime. Livy hints that the highest official in the state, and the one whose job it was to bang the nail into the Temple of Jupiter each year, was originally called the chief praetor, although the word ‘praetor’ was later used for a junior official below the consuls. There are other early titles recorded for those at the top of the political hierarchy, which only complicate the picture. These include ‘dictator’, usually described as a temporary position to cope with a military emergency, and without

the decidedly negative modern connotations of the word; and 'military tribunes with consular power', a mouthful aptly translated by one modern historian as 'colonels'.

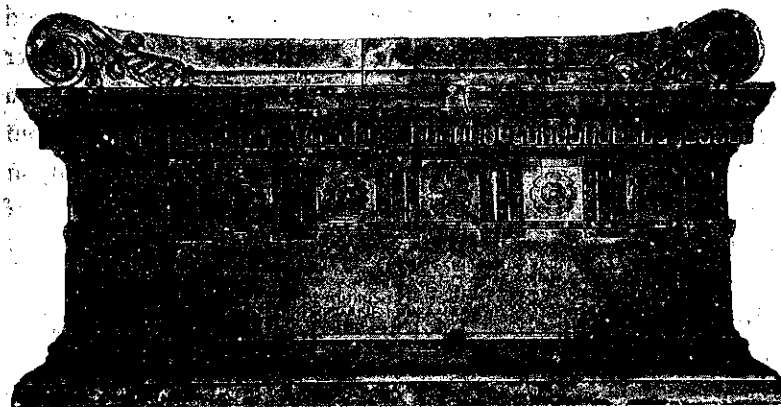
There is still a big question mark over when exactly the defining office of the Republic was invented, or when and why some other office was renamed 'consul', or even when the fundamental Republican principle that power should always be shared was first defined. 'Chief praetor' smacks of hierarchy, not equality. But whatever the key date or dates, the list of consuls on which the chronology of the Republic was based – going back in an unbroken series to Lucius Junius Brutus and Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus in 509 BCE – was in its earliest parts the product of a good deal of adjustment, imaginative inference, clever guesswork and most likely outright invention. Livy conceded, looking back from the end of the first century BCE, that it was next to impossible to sort out with confidence the chronology of officeholders in this early period. It was, he wrote, simply too long ago.

There is also a question mark over how violent the fall of the monarchy was. The Romans envisaged a fairly bloodless regime change. Lucretia was the most prominent, tragic casualty, but, though warfare was to follow, Tarquin was allowed to escape unscathed. The archaeological evidence suggests that the process of change within the city was not quite so peaceful. At least, layers of burnt debris have been excavated in the Forum and elsewhere that are plausibly dated to around 500 BCE. They could be no more than the traces of an unfortunate series of accidental fires. They are enough to hint, however, that the overthrow of Tarquin might have been a bloody, rather than bloodless, coup, and that most of the internal violence was patriotically written out of the standard narrative.

The earliest known use of the word 'consul', in fact, dates from two hundred years later. It turns up in the first surviving example of those thousands upon thousands of loquacious Roman epitaphs carefully carved on tombs all over the empire, both extravagant and humble,

which tell us so much about the lives of the deceased: the offices they held; the jobs they did, their aims, aspirations and anxieties. This one commemorates a man called Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus (the last name means 'bearded', 'long-beard' or perhaps 'beardy') and was displayed on the front of his oversized sarcophagus, which once lay in the family tomb of the Scipios just outside Rome, as burials were not usually allowed within the city itself. Barbatus was consul in 298 BCE, died around 280 BCE and almost certainly founded this ostentatious mausoleum, an unashamed promotion of the power and prestige of his family, one of the most prominent in the Republic. His seems to have been the first of more than thirty burials in it, and his coffin-cum-memorial was placed in the most prominent position, opposite the door.

The epitaph was composed soon after his death. It is four lines long and must count as the earliest historical and biographical narrative to



25. The imposing sarcophagus of Barbatus dominated the large Tomb of the Scipios. The rough local stone (or tufa), and its simple, slightly rustic look, makes a strong contrast with the elaborately sculpted marble sarcophagi of the rich in later Roman centuries. Yet in the third century BCE this was the best and most sophisticated that money could buy.

survive from ancient Rome. Short as it is, it is one of the major turning points in our understanding of Roman history. For it provides hard, more or less contemporary information on Barbatus' career – quite different from the imaginative reconstructions, faint hints buried in the soil or modern deductions about 'what must have been' that surround the fall of the monarchy. It is eloquent on the ideology and world view of the Roman elite at this period: 'Cornelius Lucius Scipio Barbatus, offspring of his father Gnaeus, a brave man and wise, whose appearance was a match for his *virtus*. He was consul and censor and aedile among you. He took Taurasia and Cisauna from Samnium. He subdued the whole of Lucania and took hostages.'

Whoever wrote it – presumably one of his heirs – extracted what seemed to be the highlights of Barbatus' career. At home ('among you') he had been elected consul and censor, one of the two officials responsible for enrolling citizens and assessing their wealth; and he had held the more junior office of aedile, which by the first century BCE, and probably earlier, was largely concerned with the upkeep and supply of the city and with organising public shows and games. Further afield, the boasts were of his military successes in southern Italy, a couple of hundred miles from Rome: he had captured two towns from the Samnites, a people with whom the Romans were repeatedly in conflict during Barbatus' lifetime; and he had subdued the region of Lucania, taking hostages from the enemy, a standard Roman method of guaranteeing 'good behaviour'.

These exploits underline the importance of warfare in the public image of leading Romans, but they also point to the military expansion of Rome at the beginning of the third century BCE, now extending a long way from the city's back door. In a battle in 295 BCE in which Barbatus served three years after he was consul, Roman forces defeated an Italian army at Sentinum, not far from modern Ancona. This was the biggest and bloodiest battle fought in the peninsula up to that date and was so far from being of merely local concern that the news

travelled widely and quickly, even by the rudimentary methods of ancient communication (messengers, word of mouth and on rare occasions a system of beacons). Sitting in his study on the Greek island of Samos, hundreds of miles away, the third-century BCE historian Duris decided that it was an event worth recording; a brief snatch of his account still survives.

Just as revealing are the other characteristics that the epitaph singles out for praise: Barbatus' bravery and wisdom and the fact that his outward appearance was equal to his *virtus*. That may mean 'virtue' in the modern sense, but it was often used more literally, to refer to the collection of qualities that defined a man (*vir*), virtue in Roman terms being the equivalent of 'manliness'. Either way, Barbatus was a man who displayed his qualities on his face. Although the popular image of the Roman man is hardly of someone much bothered with his appearance, in this open, competitive, 'face to face' society, the public figure was expected to look the part. As he walked through the Forum or stood up to address the people, his inner qualities were clearly revealed in how he looked. In Barbatus' case, unless he had simply inherited the name from his father, he sported a splendid beard, which may have been increasingly unusual at the time. One story has it that barbers first started to work in Rome in 300 BCE, and that for several centuries after that most Romans went clean-shaven.

Barbatus' Rome was very different from the Rome of the earliest Republic, two hundred years before, and it had ceased to be ordinary. Vast by the standards of the time, the city was home on a reasonable guess to something between 60,000 and 90,000 people. That put it roughly in the same bracket as a handful of the biggest urban centres in the Mediterranean world; Athens at this point had a population of considerably less than half that number, and never in its history had more than 40,000 in the city itself. What is more, Rome controlled directly a large swathe of land stretching from coast to coast, with a total population of well over half a million, and indirectly, by a series of

agreements and alliances, much more – foreshadowing its later empire. It was a place whose organisation Cicero and his contemporaries, more than two centuries away, would have recognised. As well as the two annual consuls, there was a series of junior positions, including praetors and quaestors, beneath them (Romans usually called these officials ‘magistrates’, but their function was not principally legal). The senate, made up largely of those who had previously held public office, operated as a permanent council, and the hierarchical organisation of the citizens and the Centuriate Assembly, falsely attributed to King Servius Tullius and warmly approved by Cicero, underpinned the working of Roman politics.

There were other familiar aspects. These included an army organised in legions, the beginnings of an official system of coinage and signs of an infrastructure to match the city’s size and influence. The first aqueduct to bring water into the growing conurbation was constructed in 312 BCE, a watercourse that ran mostly underground for some 10 miles from the nearby hills, not one of those extraordinary aerial constructions that we often now mean by ‘aqueduct’. This was the brainchild of a contemporary of Barbatus, the energetic Appius Claudius Caecus, who in the same year also launched the first major Roman road, the Via Appia (the Appian Way, named after him), leading straight south from Rome to Capua. For most of its length its surface was, at best, gravel, not the impressive paving slabs we can still tread. But it was a useful route for Roman armies, a convenient means of more peaceful communication and in symbolic terms a stamp of Roman power and control over the Italian landscape. It was no coincidence that for his great family tomb Barbatus chose a prime position right beside it, at the city limits, for travellers going into and out of Rome to admire.

It was at some point during this crucial period between 500 BCE and 300 BCE, between the end of the Tarquins and the lifetime of Scipio ‘Long-Beard’, that many of Rome’s characteristic institutions took shape. Romans not only defined the basic principles of Republican

politics and liberties but also began to develop the structures, the assumptions and (to put it no more grandly) a ‘way of doing things’ that underpinned their later imperial expansion. This involved a revolutionary formulation of what it was to be Roman, which defined their ideas of citizenship for centuries, set Rome apart from every other classical city-state and eventually informed many modern views of the rights and responsibilities of the citizen. It was not for nothing that both Lord Palmerston and John F. Kennedy proudly broadcast the Latin phrase *Civis Romanus sum* (‘I am a Roman citizen’) as a slogan for their times. In short, Rome for the first time began to look ‘Roman’ as we understand it, and as they understood it. The big question is, how did that happen, when and why? And what evidence survives to help explain, or even describe, Rome’s ‘great leap forward’? The chronology remains murky, and it is absolutely impossible to reconstruct a reliable historical narrative. But it is possible to glimpse some fundamental changes both at home and in Rome’s relations with the outside world.

Later Roman writers presented a clear and dramatic story of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. On the one hand, they told of a series of violent social conflicts within Rome itself: between a hereditary group of ‘patrician’ families, who monopolised all political and religious power in the city, and the mass of the citizens, or ‘plebeians’, who were completely excluded. Gradually – in a vivid tale that involves strikes, mutinies and yet another (attempted) rape – the plebeians won the right or, as they would have put it, the *freedom* to share power on more or less equal terms with the patricians. On the other hand, they stressed a series of major victories in battle that brought most of the Italian peninsula under Roman control. These started in 396 BCE, when Rome’s great local rival, the Etruscan town of Veii, fell after decades of warfare, and ended roughly a hundred years later, when victory against the Samnites made Rome by far the biggest power base in Italy, and caught the attention of Duris on Samos. Not that this was a story of unchallenged expansion. Soon after the defeat of Veii, in 390 BCE a



posse of marauding 'Gauls' sacked Rome. Exactly who these people were is now impossible to know; Roman writers were not good at distinguishing between those whom it was convenient to lump together as 'barbarian tribes' from the north, nor much interested in analysing their motives. But according to Livy, the effects were so devastating that the city had to be refounded (yet again), under the leadership of Marcus Furius Camillus – war leader, dictator, 'colonel', sometime exile and another 'second Romulus'.

This narrative is based on firmer foundations than anything before. Admittedly, even in 300 BCE the earliest Roman literature was still decades away, and the later accounts looking back to this period contain plenty of myth, embellishment and fantasy. Camillus is probably not much less fictional than the first Romulus, and we have already seen how the words of Catiline were used to ventriloquise the speeches of an early Republican revolutionary, none of whose words could possibly have survived. Yet the end of this period stands on the brink of history and history writing as we know it, far beyond a simple four-line epitaph. That is to say, when the well-connected senator Fabius Pictor, who was born around 270 BCE, sat down to compose the first extended written account of Rome's past, he might well have remembered talking in his youth to people who had been eyewitnesses to events at the end of the fourth century BCE or who had talked to men of Barbatus' generation who were. Pictor's *History* does not survive beyond a few quotations in later writers, but it was famed in the ancient world. His name and a brief synopsis of his work have even been found painted on the walls of one of the few ancient libraries ever unearthed, in Taormina in Sicily, a combination of advertisement and library catalogue. Two thousand years later, we can read Livy, who had read Pictor, who had talked to people who remembered the world as it was around 300 BCE – a fragile chain of connection deep into antiquity.

Increasingly too, fragments of contemporary evidence survive, to set against the later Roman historical account or point to an alternative

narrative. The career summary in Barbatus' epitaph is one of these. When Livy covers those years in his *History*, he writes of the Romans entering an alliance with, rather than subduing, Lucania, and he describes Barbatus fighting somewhere quite different, in northern Italy, and not very successfully at that. True, Barbatus' epitaph is likely to have magnified his achievements, and 'subdued' may have been how the Roman elite preferred to present an 'alliance'; but the inscription probably does help to correct Livy's later, slightly garbled, account. There are a number of other such fragments, including some striking paintings of about the same time, which depict scenes from the wars in which Barbatus fought. Among the most remarkable and revealing of all, however, are the eighty or so short clauses from the first written collection of Roman rules and regulations (or 'laws', to use the rather grand term that most ancient writers adopted), put together in the mid fifth century BCE and laboriously reassembled thanks to centuries of modern scholarly detective work. The collection is known as the Twelve Tables, from the twelve bronze tablets on which it was originally inscribed and displayed. It offers a window onto some of the concerns of those earliest Republican Romans, from worries about magic or assault to such tricky questions as whether it was allowed to bury a corpse with its gold teeth in place – an incidental insight into the skill of ancient dentistry that archaeology confirms.

So it is to the world of the Twelve Tables that we first turn, before going on to explore the radical changes, both internal and external, that followed. Reconstructing the history of this period is an intriguing and sometimes tantalising process, and part of the fun comes from wondering how some of the pieces of the incomplete jigsaw puzzle fit together and how to tell the difference between the fact and the fantasy. But there are enough pieces in place to be confident that the decisive change in Rome came in the fourth century BCE, in the generation of Barbatus and Appius Claudius Caecus and that of their immediate predecessors, and that what happened then, hard as it is to

pin down in detail, established a pattern of Roman politics, at home and abroad, which lasted for centuries.

### *The world of the Twelve Tables*

The Republican regime started with a whimper rather than a bang. There are all kinds of stirring tales told by Roman historians of the new political order, of warfare on a grand scale over the first few decades of the fifth century BCE and of larger than life heroes and villains, who have become the stuff of modern legend too. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, for example, who more than two millennia later gave his name to the American city of Cincinnati, is supposed to have returned from semi-exile in the 450s BCE to become dictator and lead Roman armies to victory against their enemies before nobly retiring straight back to his farm without seeking further political glory. Gaius Marcius Coriolanus, by contrast, who inspired Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, was



26. The farmer who saved the state.

This twentieth-century statue from modern Cincinnati shows Cincinnatus returning the symbols of political office and going back to his plough. Many Roman stories presented him in this way as a no-nonsense patriot but there was another side to Cincinnatus, as a die-hard opponent of the rights of the plebeians and of the poor in the city.

reputedly a war hero turned traitor around 490 BCE, who joined forces with a different enemy and would have invaded his home town had not his mother and wife intervened to dissuade him. But the reality was quite different, and of much more modest dimensions.

Whatever the political organisation of the city when the Tarquins were removed, archaeology makes it clear that for most of the fifth century BCE, Rome was not thriving at all. A sixth-century BCE temple that is sometimes linked to the name of Servius Tullius was one of those buildings burned down in the fires around 500 BCE, and it was not rebuilt for decades. And there was a definite decline in the imports of Greek pottery at the same time, which is a good indicator of levels of prosperity. Put simply, if the end of the regal period could reasonably be dubbed 'La Grande Roma dei Tarquini', the early years of the Republic were far less grand. As for all the heroic warfare that bulks so large in Roman accounts, it may have played a significant part in the Roman imagination, but it was all very local, fought out within a few miles' radius of the city. The likelihood is that this was traditional raiding between neighbouring communities or guerrilla attacks, later written up, anachronistically, as something more like formal military clashes. Much of it, no doubt, was still on a semi-private basis, drummed up by independent warlords. That, at least, is what one fabled incident in the early 470s BCE hints, when 306 Romans are said to have perished in an ambush. They were all said to be from a single family, the Fabii, plus their dependants, hangers-on and clients: more a large gang than an army.

The Twelve Tables are the best antidote to those later heroising narratives. The original bronze tablets no longer survive. But some of their content has been preserved because later Romans looked on this motley collection of regulations as the beginning of their distinguished tradition of law. What had been inscribed on bronze was soon put into pamphlet form and was still being learned by heart, so Cicero tells us, by schoolboys of the first century BCE. Long after

the rules had any practical force, they continued to be reissued and re-edited, and several ancient scholarly commentaries were compiled on the meaning of the individual clauses, their legal importance and language – to the irritation of some lawyers in the second century CE, who felt that their book-bound colleagues were rather too interested in the linguistic puzzles of old Roman precepts. None of this voluminous literature survives intact. But some of it is quoted or paraphrased in writing that does, and by scouring through this, including some of the remotest byways of Roman literature, scholars have tracked down the eighty or so clauses of those fifth-century BCE tables.

The whole process has been ferociously technical, and intricate debates still rage about the exact wording of the clauses, about how large and how representative a selection of the original they are and about how accurate the later Roman scholars were in their quotations. Some modernising has definitely gone on: the Latin looks archaic, but not quite archaic enough for the fifth century BCE, and on occasion the paraphrases have tried to bring the original sense into line with later procedures in Roman law. In some cases, even learned Roman lawyers misunderstood what they read in the Twelve Tables. The idea that a defaulting debtor who had several creditors could be put to death and his body divided between them, in appropriately sized pieces, according to the amount owed, looks like one such misunderstanding (or so many modern critics have hoped). All the same, these quotations offer the most direct route into mid-fifth-century BCE society, into its homes and families, worries and intellectual horizons.

It is a much simpler society, and its horizons much more restricted, than Livy's account ever implies. That is clear from the language and forms of expression as much as from the content. Although modern translations do their best to make it all sound fairly lucid, the original Latin wording is often far from that. In particular, the absence of nouns and differentiated pronouns can make it almost impossible to know who is doing what to whom. 'If he summons to law, he is to go. If he

does not go, he is to call to witness, then is to seize him' presumably means, as it is usually translated, 'If a *plaintiff* summons a *defendant* to law, the *defendant* is to go. If he does not go, the *plaintiff* is to call *someone else* to witness, then is to seize the *defendant*.' But it does not exactly say that. All the signs are that whoever drafted this and many other clauses was still struggling to use written language to frame precise regulations, and that the conventions of logical argument and rational expression were very much in their infancy.

Yet the mere attempt to create a formal record of this sort was an important stage in what is now often called state formation. One of the key turning points in many early societies is the rudimentary, usually very partial, codification of law. In ancient Athens, for example, the work of Draco in the seventh century BCE, though now a byword for harshness ('draconian'), was notable as the first attempt there to put what had been oral rules into writing; a thousand years before that in Babylon, Hammurabi's code did something similar. The Twelve Tables are much on that pattern. They are a long way from being a comprehensive legal code and may well never have been intended as such. Unless the range of surviving quotations is very misleading, they included almost nothing on public, constitutional law. What they do imply is a commitment to agreed, shared and publicly acknowledged procedures for resolving disputes and some thought on dealing with practical and theoretical obstacles to that. What was to be done if the defendant was too elderly to come to meet the plaintiff? The plaintiff was to provide an animal to transport him. What was to happen if the guilty party was a child? The penalty in that case might be beating, rather than hanging – a distinction that heralds our ideas of the age of criminal responsibility.

The themes of the regulations point to a world of multiple inequalities. There were slaves of various types, from defaulters on their loans who had fallen into some form of debt bondage to those fully enslaved, presumably (though this is only a guess) captured in raiding or war.

And their disadvantage was spelled out: the penalty for assault on a slave is set at half as much as for assault on a free man, whereas a slave could be punished with his life for an offence for which free citizens got off with not much more than a beating. But some slaves were eventually freed, as is clear from a reference to an ex-slave, or *libertus*.

There were hierarchies within the free citizen population too. One clause draws a distinction between patricians and plebeians, another between *assidui* (men of property) and *proletarii* (those without property – whose contribution to the city was the production of offspring, *proles*). Another refers to ‘patrons’ and ‘clients’ and to a relationship of dependency and mutual obligation between richer and poorer citizens that remained important throughout Roman history. The basic principle was that the client depended on his patron for protection and assistance, financial and otherwise, in return for a variety of services rendered, including votes in elections. Later Roman writing is full of rather high-flown rhetoric from the patron class on the virtues of the relationship, and miserable complaints from the side of the client about the humiliations they have to go through, all for a second-rate meal. In the Twelve Tables, the rule simply states: ‘If a patron has done harm to his client, he is to be cursed’ – whatever that meant.

For the most part, the Twelve Tables confront domestic problems, with a heavy focus on family life, troublesome neighbours, private property and death. They lay down procedures for the abandonment or killing of deformed babies (a practice common throughout antiquity, euphemistically known to modern scholars as ‘exposure’), for inheritance and for the proper conduct of funerals. Particular clauses prohibit women from tearing their cheeks in mourning, funeral pyres being built too close to someone’s house and the burial of gold – except dental gold – with the body. Criminal and accidental damage was another obvious concern. This was a world in which people worried about how to cope with their neighbour’s tree overhanging their property (solution: it had to be cut back to a specified height) or with

their neighbour’s animals running amok (solution: the damage had to be made good or the animal surrendered). They worried about thieves breaking in at night, which was to be punished more harshly than daylight theft, about vandals destroying their crops or about stray weapons accidentally hitting the innocent. But, just in case this all sounds a bit too familiar, it was also a world in which people worried about magic. What should you do if some enemy bewitched your crops or cast a spell on you? Sadly, the remedy for this is lost.

To judge from the Twelve Tables, Rome in the mid fifth century BCE was an agricultural town, complex enough to recognise basic divisions between slave and free and between different ranks of citizen and sophisticated enough to have devised some formal civic procedures to deal consistently with disputes, to regulate social and family relations and to impose some basic rules on such human activities as the disposal of the dead. But there is no evidence that it was more than that. The strikingly tentative formulation of the regulations, in places awkward or even confusing, should call into question some of the references in Livy and other ancient writers to complicated laws and treaties at this period. And the absence, at least from the selection of clauses preserved, of any reference to a specific public official, apart from a Vestal Virgin (who as a priestess was to be free of her father’s control), certainly does not suggest a dominant state apparatus. What is more, there is hardly any mention of the world outside Rome – beyond a couple of references to how particular rules applied to a *hostis* (a ‘foreigner’ or an ‘enemy’; the same Latin word, significantly, can mean both) and one possible reference to sale into slavery ‘in foreign country across the Tiber’, as a punishment of last resort for debt. Maybe this collection had an intentionally internal rather than external focus. All the same, there is no hint in the Twelve Tables that this was a community putting a high priority on relations, whether of dominance, exploitation or friendship, beyond its locality.

It all seems a world away from the age of Cicero, and even from the



age of Barbatus and Appius Claudius Caecus, a little over a hundred years later, with their parade of public offices, that new road striking south to Capua and the boast about hostages from Lucania (see plate 5). So what changed, and when?

### *The Conflict of the Orders*

First, what happened in politics at home? The Twelve Tables were one of the outcomes of what is often now called the Conflict of the Orders (the Latin word *ordo* meaning, among other things, 'social rank'), which according to Roman writers dominated domestic politics in those crucial couple of hundred years after the end of the monarchy. This was the struggle by the plebeian citizens for full political rights and for parity with the elite, patrician citizens, who were generally loath to give up their hereditary monopoly of power. In Rome it was seen ever after as a heroic vindication of the political liberty of the ordinary citizen, and it has left its mark on the politics, and political vocabulary, of the modern world too. The word 'plebeian' remains an especially loaded term in our class conflicts; even in 2012, the allegation that a British Conservative politician had insulted a policeman by calling him a 'pleb' – short for 'plebeian' – led to his resignation from the government.

As the story of this conflict unfolds, it was only a few years after the Republic had been established, at the beginning of the fifth century BCE, that the plebeians began objecting to their exclusion from power and their exploitation by the patricians. Why fight in Rome's wars, they repeatedly asked, when all the profits of their service lined patrician pockets? How could they count themselves full citizens when they were subject to random and arbitrary punishment, even enslavement if they fell into debt? What right had the patricians to keep the plebeians as an underclass? Or, as Livy scripted the ironic

words of one plebeian reformer, in terms uncannily reminiscent of twentieth-century opposition to apartheid, 'Why don't you pass a law to stop a plebeian from living next door to a patrician, or walking down the same street, or going to the same party, or standing side by side in the same Forum?'

In 494 BCE, plagued by problems of debt, the plebeians staged the first of several mass walkouts from the city, a combination of a mutiny and a strike, to try to force reform on the patricians. It worked. For it launched a long series of concessions which gradually eroded all the significant differences between patricians and plebeians and effectively rewrote the political power structure of the city. Two hundred years later there was little to patrician privilege beyond the right to hold a few ancient priesthoods and to wear a particular form of fancy footwear.

The first reform in 494 BCE was the appointment of official representatives, known as tribunes of the people (*tribuni plebis*), to defend the interests of the plebeians. Then a special assembly was established for plebeians only. This was organised, like the Centuriate Assembly, on a system of block voting, but the technical details were crucially different. It was not based on a hierarchy of wealth. Instead, the voting groups were defined geographically, with voters enrolled in tribes (*tribus*), or regional subdivisions of Roman territory, nothing to do with any ethnic grouping that the modern sense of 'tribe' might imply. Finally, after one last walkout, in a reform that Scipio Barbatus would have witnessed in 287 BCE, the decisions of this assembly were given the automatic binding force of law over all Roman citizens. A plebeian institution, in other words, was given the right to legislate over, and on behalf of, the state as a whole.

Between 494 and 287 BCE, amid yet more stirring rhetoric, strikes and threats of violence, all major offices and priesthoods were step by step opened up to plebeians and their second-class status was dismantled. One of the most famed plebeian victories came in 326 BCE,

### **Guiding Questions for *SPQR*, pgs. 131-146**

- 1.** What is the evidence that Beard indicates might demonstrate a violent coup/change of government at the end of the 6th century BCE?
- 2.** What are the specific details that are inscribed on Scipio Barbatus' tomb? Why do you think the Romans chose those specific things to highlight?
- 3.** Why do you think that taking hostages was an effective way of ensuring 'good behavior' among Rome's subdued enemies?
- 4.** As described on pg. 136, what are the changes enacted in the 4th-3rd centuries BCE that displayed Rome's growing wealth and power?
- 5.** Describe the state of Rome's prosperity and its military engagements in the 5th century BCE, per the information on pg. 141.
- 6.** Define the purpose of written, codified law and why it demonstrates a certain stage of evolution in an ancient society's development.
- 7.** What do the Twelve Tables predominately deal with, and what does that reveal to us about Roman society at the time of their creation?

**More on the back!!!**

**8. The Twelve Tables are curiously focused on internal affairs, almost neglecting entirely foreign relations and issues. What does this indicate about Roman society at this time?**

**More on the back!!!**